**SFC Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller**

This article details the life, distinguished military career, and ultimate sacrifice of Sergeant First Class Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller, a dedicated U.S. Army Special Operations Forces soldier. His unwavering commitment to service culminated in his death during Operation Enduring Freedom in Pakistan in February 2010. This document highlights his pivotal role within Civil Affairs operations, the complexities of his final mission, and the profound impact of his passing on his family and the broader U.S. Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) community.

SFC Sluss-Tiller's career encompassed significant assignments at Fort Bragg, Germany, and Kuwait, as well as deployments to Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan. His final assignment as Team Sergeant for Civil Affairs Team 622, 96th Civil Affairs Battalion, placed him at the forefront of critical stability operations. He was killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) while attending a school inauguration and training local security forces in Pakistan. Posthumously, he was awarded the Purple Heart and two Bronze Stars, among numerous other commendations. In a lasting tribute, the culminating exercise for the Civil Affairs Qualification Course (CAQC) was renamed "Operation Sluss-Tiller" in his honor, embedding his sacrifice into the very fabric of future Civil Affairs training. This report aims to meticulously document his contributions and enduring legacy, ensuring adherence to rigorous professional and academic standards.

**Introduction**

Sergeant First Class Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller stands as a distinguished figure within the U.S. Army Special Operations Forces, whose life of dedicated service to his nation culminated in his sacrifice during Operation Enduring Freedom in Pakistan in 2010.1 This article provides a comprehensive account of SFC Sluss-Tiller's life, his extensive military career, the intricate context of his final mission, and the lasting tributes established in his memory. The objective is to synthesize available information into a coherent, authoritative narrative, adhering to strict professional and academic formatting standards, including precise citation and narrative coherence.

The complexities of modern military operations, particularly the evolving role of Civil Affairs in counterinsurgency and stability efforts, defined much of SFC Sluss-Tiller's later career. The decision to dedicate a significant training exercise, "Operation Sluss-Tiller," to a fallen soldier elevates his individual sacrifice beyond a personal tragedy, transforming it into a collective symbol for an entire military branch.5 This naming convention serves as more than a mere memorial; it reshapes his story into a pedagogical instrument. It imbues the training with a profound sense of real-world consequence and the gravity of sacrifice, emotionally connecting future Civil Affairs soldiers to the inherent realities of their potential missions. This process reinforces the high stakes and the human cost of Civil Affairs operations, rendering the training more impactful and directly relevant. It also implicitly highlights the critical nature of the mission on which he was engaged, as it now serves as a benchmark for the development and preparation of future Civil Affairs personnel.

**Early Life and Foundations of Service**

Matthew Stephen Sluss-Tiller was born on February 14, 1974, in Ashland, Kentucky, and spent his formative years in Catlettsburg, Kentucky.12 From a very young age, he exhibited a clear inclination towards military service. His childhood was marked by playing "soldier with his G.I. Joe toys," a pastime that foreshadowed his future calling.21 His father, Edward Tiller, affirmed this early ambition, recalling, "From the time I bought him his first GI Joe, he wanted to be an Army man".15 Similarly, Brenda Thornbury, his former art teacher, observed that "he knew from a young age what he wanted to do".15 This consistent early interest suggests a deeply ingrained predisposition towards a life of service and leadership.

His personal life was equally foundational. As an only child, he navigated his parents' divorce at a young age but successfully cultivated strong relationships with his step-parents.16 He met his future wife, Melissa, in eighth grade, and their bond endured for 16 years of marriage.17 He was a devoted husband and a loving father to their daughter, Hannah, who was merely three years old at the time of his passing.18 Melissa often spoke of their close connection, noting, "He used to sing to me and Hannah… He would dance with her standing on his feet, singing loudly".16

Beyond his military aspirations, Sluss-Tiller was described as a happy and energetic individual who cherished the outdoors. His hobbies included golfing, hunting, riding four-wheelers, swimming, and biking. He also possessed a keen intellect and a passion for languages, including Arabic. Throughout his life, he was consistently characterized by his bravery, determination, diligence, compassion, and exceptional leadership qualities, often commanding respect and inspiring those around him.21 His wife, Melissa, affectionately referred to him as "my hero," emphasizing that "He loved people… He had a heart of gold and would readily do anything for anybody".19 This continuity between his childhood aspirations and his adult profession indicates that his commitment to the military was not merely a career choice but an integral part of his identity and personal values. This deep-seated drive likely fueled his continuous pursuit of excellence and his desire to join more elite units, offering a deeper understanding of his profound motivation and resilience.21 It frames his military service as a natural extension of his character rather than simply a professional path. This is further supported by Lieutenant General John Mulholland's description of him as "one of the finest soldiers in the world".20

**Assignments and Deployments**

SFC Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller's military career began with his enlistment in the U.S. Army Reserves in 1991 as a heavy construction mechanic while still in high school.19 He served with the 261st Ordnance Company in Cross Lanes, West Virginia. Upon graduating from Lawrence County High School in 1993, he transitioned to active duty, becoming a signal specialist, serving with the 82nd Signal Battalion. 38 His early active duty assignments included postings at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; Kitzingen, Germany; and Kuwait.19

A significant turning point in his career occurred in April 2009 when he was assigned to the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne), a component of the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade (Airborne), based at Fort Bragg.20 Within this unit, he served initially as a Civil Affairs Noncommissioned Officer in the Civil-Military Operations Cell, and most recently as Team Sergeant of Civil Affairs Team 622.20 The 96th Civil Affairs Battalion is notable as part of the only active-duty U.S. special operations forces civil affairs brigade, underscoring the elite nature of his role.23

Throughout his distinguished service, SFC Sluss-Tiller undertook multiple operational deployments to various theaters. He deployed in support of Operation Joint Guardian in Kosovo, Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq, and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.22 His final deployment was in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Pakistan.1

His commitment to professional development was evident in his extensive advanced training. He successfully completed the U.S. Army Airborne course, the rigorous Jumpmaster course, the Master Jumpmaster course, the Air Movement Operations course, the Military Transition Team course, the Civil Affairs Qualification Course (CAQC), and both the Advanced and Basic Noncommissioned Officer's courses.25 This progression from a heavy construction mechanic in the Reserves to a signal specialist in active duty, followed by assignments in Germany and Kuwait, and culminating in his transfer to the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion, reflects a deliberate and continuous pursuit of more challenging and specialized roles within the military.21 This extensive advanced training, including Jumpmaster and Civil Affairs Qualification, further emphasizes this trajectory towards elite Special Operations Forces (SOF). This pattern indicates a soldier who was not content with static roles but actively sought to challenge himself, acquire new skills, and contribute to more elite and impactful missions. This drive is characteristic of Special Operations Forces personnel, demonstrating a commitment to continuous self-improvement and a desire to operate at the highest levels of military capability. It suggests a deep personal alignment with the SOF ethos of being "one of the finest soldiers in the world".20

**The Evolving Role of Civil Affairs in Modern Conflict**

Civil Affairs (CA) operations represent a sophisticated blend of civilian and military efforts, fundamentally addressing conflicts as primarily political struggles. The core mission of CA is to simultaneously contain insurgency and tackle its underlying causes.6 CA soldiers are specifically trained to operate in complex, often politically sensitive or denied environments, utilizing specialized tactics to engage with civil authorities and civilian populations. Their objective is to influence human behavior and mitigate threats, often by supporting host nation governments, fostering the development of local and national governmental structures, and undertaking development work relevant to counterinsurgency efforts.7

Historically, combat operations have frequently overshadowed peace operations. However, there has been a growing recognition of the critical importance of "winning the peace," a domain increasingly managed by Civil Affairs units.The 96th Civil Affairs Battalion, SFC Sluss-Tiller's unit, exemplifies this evolution. Activated in 1945, the battalion has a rich history, participating in diverse missions from post-war occupation in South Korea to Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada and Operation Just Cause in Panama. In Panama, their responsibilities included managing displaced civilian camps, establishing new police forces, and engaging in nation-building initiatives. The unit became an airborne entity in 1986 and was later assigned to the CENTCOM area of operations.2 Significant organizational changes occurred during the Global War on Terror, including the establishment of Civil Affairs as a distinct branch within the Regular Army in 2006 and the formation of the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade.23

American counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine posits that military force is rarely the decisive factor, though security remains an essential prerequisite for success.6 CA efforts are thus strategically directed towards cultivating governmental structures that genuinely serve their populations. A key innovation in this approach has been the creation of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), which integrate civilian and military personnel to conduct developmental work deemed crucial for success in Iraq and Afghanistan.6 The effective use of irregular security forces—indigenous forces recruited locally—also plays a vital role in assisting host nation governments and counterinsurgent forces. Their success, however, hinges on crucial prerequisites: partnership with an advisory force, the consent of the host nation's government, and accountability to local civil authority.7

Operating in COIN environments presents numerous challenges. Insurgencies are multifaceted political struggles, often involving complex, non-hierarchical networks of actors with various aims. They rely on charismatic leadership, a network of supporters, supplies, safe havens, and funding, frequently exploiting societal grievances by manipulating religious, tribal, or local identities.6 A critical aspect of counterinsurgent operational planning involves disrupting insurgent access to sanctuary and safe-havens, which necessitates a deep understanding of the physical terrain, cultural demographics, and the integration of border operations into the overarching strategy.7 The "Operation Sluss-Tiller" exercise itself, designed to train future Civil Affairs personnel, emphasizes the profound need for cultural competence, the delicate art of rapport building, and the ability to navigate complex human dynamics within these environments.5

SFC Sluss-Tiller's role within the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion, particularly his final mission, exemplifies the critical and often dangerous evolution of modern warfare towards "winning the peace" through non-military means, even within active combat zones. His work directly involved both humanitarian and developmental aid, as seen in his attendance at a school inauguration, and security force assistance, through the training of Pakistani paramilitary forces.9 This highlights the evolving nature of conflict, where long-term success increasingly depends on efforts to build stability and address the root causes of insurgency, rather than relying solely on kinetic operations. SFC Sluss-Tiller's role underscores the inherent danger in these "soft power" missions, as they frequently take place in highly volatile, contested areas, blurring the traditional lines between combat and stability operations and placing Civil Affairs personnel at significant risk. His death, occurring during a seemingly benign humanitarian event, tragically illustrates this inherent danger and the critical importance of protecting those engaged in the vital work of "winning the peace."13

Furthermore, the mission of SFC Sluss-Tiller's team—attending a school dedication while simultaneously training local security forces—demonstrates the integrated approach essential for effective counterinsurgency. In this framework, development and security are not separate endeavors but mutually reinforcing elements. His mission combined a "hearts and minds" component, represented by the school, with a "security capacity building" component, embodied by the paramilitary training.9 This reflects a core principle of modern counterinsurgency: that sustainable stability and the defeat of insurgency depend on addressing both immediate security threats and underlying socio-economic grievances. The school provides a tangible benefit to the population, potentially reducing support for insurgents, while the paramilitary training directly enhances the host nation's ability to provide security. This exemplifies the strategic understanding that security cannot be achieved in isolation; it must be coupled with efforts to improve governance, provide essential services, and foster economic development. Conversely, development efforts are often unsustainable without a baseline of security. SFC Sluss-Tiller's sacrifice occurred at the nexus of these two critical, interdependent pillars of counterinsurgency, underscoring the holistic and inherently dangerous nature of such operations in volatile regions.

**The Final Mission: Sacrifice in Pakistan**

Sergeant First Class Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller's life of service tragically concluded on February 3, 2010, in Timagara, located within the Lower Dir District of Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province.1 He was killed when insurgents attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device (IED).26 The blast occurred outside a school, a location that underscores the civilian-centric nature of his mission.27

At the time of the attack, SFC Sluss-Tiller was serving as Team Sergeant for Civil Affairs Team 622, part of the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion.20 His team was assigned to the Office of the Defense Representative, Pakistan, with a mandate to conduct civil affairs-related training at the explicit invitation of the Government of Pakistan.28 On that fateful day, they were in Lower Dir to attend an inauguration ceremony for a girls' school that had recently undergone renovation with U.S. humanitarian assistance funds.28 In addition to this developmental work, SFC Sluss-Tiller and his team were engaged in training the Pakistan Paramilitary Frontier Corps in counterinsurgency techniques and assisting in guarding the volatile border region.29

The IED attack resulted in multiple casualties. In addition to SFC Sluss-Tiller, Army Sgt. 1st Class David J. Hartman and Army Staff Sgt. Mark A. Stets Jr. were killed.3 The devastating blast also claimed the lives of three children and a Pakistani paramilitary soldier, and wounded two other U.S. service members.13

Rear Adm. Hal Pittman, Director of Communication at U.S. Central Command, issued a strong condemnation of the attack, stating, "This attack demonstrates the terrorists' lack of respect for life, and their willingness to use violence against women and children as a means for advancing their malign vision".10 He reiterated that the U.S. personnel were in Pakistan at the request of the Pakistani government to provide training and emphasized that "this horrific attack will not dissuade that partnership".10

The attack on SFC Sluss-Tiller's team, specifically targeting a school dedication and training mission, highlights the inherent vulnerability of civil affairs and humanitarian efforts in insurgent environments. It demonstrates how adversaries strategically exploit the very nature of these "soft power" missions to achieve broader objectives. This type of attack is not random; it represents a calculated tactic by insurgents to undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of governmental and foreign assistance. By targeting a school, they aim to terrorize the local population, deter cooperation with foreign forces, and disrupt efforts to build stability and trust. This reveals a strategic understanding by the enemy that "winning the peace" is as critical as winning battles, and consequently, the personnel engaged in these efforts become prime targets, despite their often non-combat roles. This tragic event exposes the paradox that efforts to build goodwill and stability can inadvertently create high-value targets for those seeking to sow chaos and instability.6

**Awards, Honors, and Lasting Tributes**

Following his ultimate sacrifice, Sergeant First Class Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller received significant posthumous recognition for his distinguished service. He was awarded the Purple Heart and two Bronze Stars.4 His extensive list of military commendations also included two Meritorious Service Medals (one with 1 Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster), five Army Commendation Medals (one with 4 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters), the Joint Service Achievement Medal, five Army Achievement Medals (one with 4 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters), five Army Good Conduct Medals, the National Defense Service Medal with bronze star, the Kosovo Campaign Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, and the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal. He also earned the Senior Parachutist's Badge, the Gold Recruiter's Badge with three sapphires, and German Jump wings.28

The significance of his key posthumous awards is profound:

* **Purple Heart:** This distinguished military decoration is awarded to members of the U.S. Armed Forces who are wounded or killed as a direct or indirect result of enemy action.29 SFC Sluss-Tiller's death by an enemy improvised explosive device directly qualified him for this honor.29
* **Bronze Star Medal:** This medal is awarded for heroism, outstanding achievement, or meritorious service (not involving aerial flight) in a combat theater, while engaged in action against an enemy or in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force.30 The two Bronze Stars signify multiple instances of distinguished service or exceptional achievement in combat zones throughout his career.4

Beyond formal military accolades, SFC Sluss-Tiller's memory is honored through various memorials and commemorations. Most notably, the culminating exercise for the U.S. Army's Civil Affairs Qualification Course (CAQC) was renamed "Operation Sluss-Tiller" in his honor.5 This three-week, human-engagement intensive, simulated military operation is designed to rigorously test students' skills in complex, ambiguous environments, replicating real-world ARSOF missions within a fictional country known as "Pineland".5 Organizations like Spirit of America have actively supported this exercise, integrating real-world examples to enhance its realism and effectiveness.31 The naming of this exercise represents a profound institutionalization of his sacrifice, transforming his individual story into a foundational element of future Civil Affairs training and identity. Beyond a simple memorial, this act embeds his sacrifice directly into the curriculum and ethos of Civil Affairs. It means every future Civil Affairs soldier undergoing the Qualification Course will encounter his name and the context of his death. This serves multiple purposes: it humanizes the risks inherent in Civil Affairs operations, provides a tangible example of the ultimate sacrifice, and reinforces the importance of the training—especially regarding cultural competence and navigating complex environments—by linking it to a real-world tragedy. It ensures his legacy is not just remembered but actively learned from, shaping the mindset of new generations of Civil Affairs professionals. This institutionalization elevates his story from a personal tragedy to a strategic lesson for the entire branch.

Further public recognitions include street names and bridges dedicated in his honor. Specifically, a bridge on Kentucky Route 1098 in Knott County was officially designated the "SFC Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller Memorial Bridge".32 A memorial street sign also exists on Fort Bragg, further cementing his place in military history.33

Support for his family has also been a significant aspect of his enduring legacy. The Tunnel to Towers Foundation, through its Gold Star Family Home Program, paid off the mortgage of the Sluss-Tiller family home, providing Melissa and Hannah with a mortgage-free residence.34 This initiative aims to honor the legacy of those who made the ultimate sacrifice and provide tangible support to their surviving spouses and young children.35 This crucial support significantly reduced financial stress for Melissa, enabling her to focus on Hannah's major spinal fusion surgeries, demonstrating a practical and profound impact on their lives.36 The combination of military awards, public memorials, and private foundation support demonstrates a multi-faceted societal recognition of SFC Sluss-Tiller's sacrifice. This highlights a broad and enduring commitment to honoring fallen heroes and supporting their families. These diverse tributes—from official military decorations to state-level public memorials and private charitable initiatives—collectively signify a widespread societal acknowledgment of the profound cost of military service and a deep sense of gratitude for ultimate sacrifice. This multi-layered recognition system underscores a commitment to ensuring that the families of fallen service members are not forgotten and receive tangible assistance. It also serves as a continuous public reminder of the sacrifices made by individuals like SFC Sluss-Tiller for national security. The specific detail about the Tunnel to Towers Foundation alleviating financial stress for Melissa, particularly during Hannah's medical needs, highlights the practical, life-altering impact of such programs, demonstrating that gratitude extends beyond symbolic gestures to concrete assistance for the enduring challenges faced by Gold Star families.

**Conclusion**

Sergeant First Class Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller's life left an indelible mark as a soldier, leader, husband, and father. His unwavering dedication to service, characterized by a continuous pursuit of excellence and a profound commitment to his country, culminated in his ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. He embodied the highest ideals of a U.S. Army Special Operations Forces soldier, consistently challenging himself and striving to make a meaningful difference in the world.21

His legacy endures, not only through the cherished memories held by his family and friends but also through significant institutional recognitions and public memorials. The naming of the Civil Affairs Qualification Course's culminating exercise as "Operation Sluss-Tiller" ensures that his story and the lessons of his mission are integrated into the training of every future Civil Affairs soldier.5 This serves as a poignant reminder of the human cost of conflict and the critical, often understated, role of Civil Affairs in global stability operations. SFC Sluss-Tiller's sacrifice extends beyond immediate family and military peers, influencing future generations of soldiers through training and serving as a perpetual reminder of the sacrifices required for national security. His young daughter, Hannah, was only three years old when he died, and his family continues to receive support from organizations like the Tunnel to Towers Foundation.37 This demonstrates that the impact of a soldier's sacrifice is not confined to their immediate loss but ripples through time, affecting their direct descendants and shaping the institutional memory and future readiness of the military. His story becomes a living lesson, ensuring that the principles he embodied and the realities of his mission are understood by those who follow in his footsteps, thereby contributing to the long-term effectiveness and ethos of the Civil Affairs community and the broader U.S. Army. This multi-generational impact underscores the enduring nature of military sacrifice and the collective responsibility to remember and learn.

The nation's gratitude for his service and sacrifice is evident in the numerous awards, memorials, and the ongoing support provided to his family. SFC Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller's life stands as a testament to profound patriotism and selfless devotion, ensuring that his contributions to national security will be remembered and honored for generations to come.

**Rest in Peace Matt!**

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**Tables**

**Table 1: SFC Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller: Key Military Assignments and Deployments**

| Dates (From-To) | Unit/Command | Role | Location | Operation (if applicable) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1991 | U.S. Army Reserves, 261st Ordnance Company | Heavy Construction Mechanic | Cross Lanes, WV |  |
| 1993 | U.S. Army (Active Duty) | Signal Specialist | Fort Bragg, NC; Kitzingen, Germany; Kuwait |  |
| Prior to 2009 | (Various) | (Various) | Kosovo | Operation Joint Guardian24 |
| Prior to 2009 | (Various) | (Various) | Iraq | Operation Iraqi Freedom24 |
| Prior to 2009 | (Various) | (Various) | Afghanistan | Operation Enduring Freedom24 |
| April 2009 – Feb 2010 | 96th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne), 95th Civil Affairs Brigade (Airborne) | Civil Affairs NCO, Team Sergeant (Civil Affairs Team 622) | Fort Bragg, NC; Pakistan | Operation Enduring Freedom1 |
| Feb 3, 2010 | 96th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne), Civil Affairs Team 622 | Team Sergeant | Timagara, Lower Dir District, Pakistan | Operation Enduring Freedom1 |

**Table 2: Awards and Decorations of SFC Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller**

| Award/Decoration Name | Number/Device (if applicable) | Brief Significance/Criteria |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Purple Heart | 1st Award (Posthumous) | Awarded for wounds or death as a direct or indirect result of enemy action29 |
| Bronze Star Medal | Two (2) (Posthumous) | Awarded for heroism, outstanding achievement, or meritorious service in a combat theater30 |
| Meritorious Service Medal | Two (2) (with 1 Bronze OLC) | Awarded for outstanding non-combat meritorious achievement or service28 |
| Army Commendation Medal | Five (5) (with 4 Bronze OLC) | Awarded for sustained acts of heroism or meritorious service28 |
| Joint Service Achievement Medal | One (1) | Awarded for meritorious achievement or service while serving in a joint activity28 |
| Army Achievement Medal | Five (5) (with 4 Bronze OLC) | Awarded for meritorious service or achievement of a lesser degree28 |
| Army Good Conduct Medal | Five (5) | Awarded for exemplary behavior, efficiency, and fidelity in active federal military service28 |
| National Defense Service Medal | One (1) (with bronze star) | Awarded for honorable active service during a period of national emergency or war28 |
| Kosovo Campaign Medal | One (1) | Awarded for direct participation in Operation Joint Guardian in Kosovo28 |
| Iraq Campaign Medal | One (1) | Awarded for direct participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom28 |
| Afghanistan Campaign Medal | One (1) | Awarded for direct participation in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan28 |
| Global War on Terrorism Service Medal | One (1) | Awarded for military service in the Global War on Terrorism28 |
| Senior Parachutist's Badge | One (1) | Denotes qualification as a senior parachutist28 |
| Gold Recruiter's Badge | One (1) (with 3 sapphires) | Denotes achievement in recruiting28 |
| German Jump wings | One (1) | Denotes completion of German airborne training28 |

**Endnotes**

1. SFC Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller was killed on February 3, 2010, in Pakistan while serving in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.(<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/html/CREC-2014-04-03-pt1-PgS2137.htm>); <https://thefallen.militarytimes.com/army-sgt-1st-class-matthew-s-sluss-tiller/4494757>
2. The 96th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne) is a component of the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade (Airborne). <https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/96th-civil-affairs-battalion-airborne-advise-maintain-create/>;(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/96th_Civil_Affairs_Battalion>)
3. SFC Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller, Army Sgt. 1st Class David J. Hartman, and Army Staff Sgt. Mark A. Stets Jr. were killed on February 3, 2010, in Timagara, Pakistan. <https://thefallen.militarytimes.com/army-sgt-1st-class-matthew-s-sluss-tiller/4494757>; [https://thefallen.militarytimes.com/army-staff-sgt-mark-a-stets-jr/4494750](https://thefallen.militarytimes.com/army-sgt-1st-class-mark-a-stets-jr/4494750); <https://thefallen.militarytimes.com/army-sgt-1st-class-david-j-hartman/4494751>
4. SFC Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and two Bronze Stars.(<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/html/CREC-2014-04-03-pt1-PgS2137.htm>); <https://www.taps.org/gratefulnation>; <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>
5. "Operation Sluss-Tiller" is the culminating exercise for the U.S. Army's Civil Affairs Qualification Course (CAQC), designed to test students' skills in human-engagement intensive, simulated military operations in a fictional country called "Pineland." Spirit of America supports this exercise.(https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MA-20/Rasmussen-Sluss-Tiller.pdf);(https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/March-April-2020/Rasmussen-Sluss-Tiller/); <https://www.taps.org/gratefulnation>; <https://www.swcs.mil/Portals/111/ca_sluss-tiller.pdf>; <https://www.airbornesignal.com/copy-2-of-gwot-murphy>;(https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1038720.pdf); <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/636325/civil-affairs-overview>; <https://spiritofamerica.org/support-civil-affairs-sluss-tiller>; <https://www.swcs.mil/Portals/111/NewcomersGuide.pdf>
6. Civil Affairs (CA) operations are a blend of civilian and military efforts, addressing conflicts as primarily political struggles, aiming to contain insurgency and address its root causes.(https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Books/CSI-Press-Publications/Counterinsurgency-and-Stability/); <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf>
7. American counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine posits that military force is rarely the decisive factor, though security remains an essential prerequisite for success. CA efforts are strategically directed towards cultivating governmental structures that genuinely serve their populations.(<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Books/CSI-Press-Publications/Counterinsurgency-and-Stability/>); <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf>
8. The 96th Civil Affairs Battalion became an airborne unit in 1986 and was later assigned to the CENTCOM area of operations. <https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/96th-civil-affairs-battalion-airborne-advise-maintain-create/>
9. SFC Sluss-Tiller's team was assigned to the Office of the Defense Representative, Pakistan, to conduct civil affairs-related training and attend a school inauguration that had been renovated with U.S. humanitarian assistance funds. <https://www.swcs.mil/Portals/111/ca_sluss-tiller.pdf>;(<https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/903782/us-military-deaths-in-pakistan/>); <https://arsof-history.org/fallen/2010_hartman_david.html>; <https://www.airbornesignal.com/copy-2-of-gwot-murphy>; <https://www.airbornesignal.com/copy-2-of-gwot-murphy>;(<https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/903782/us-military-deaths-in-pakistan/>)
10. Rear Adm. Hal Pittman, Director of Communication at U.S. Central Command, condemned the attack, stating it "demonstrates the terrorists' lack of respect for life, and their willingness to use violence against women and children as a means for advancing their malign vision."(<https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/903782/us-military-deaths-in-pakistan/>)
11. The attack on SFC Sluss-Tiller's team, specifically targeting a school dedication and training mission, highlights the inherent vulnerability of civil affairs and humanitarian efforts in insurgent environments.(<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Books/CSI-Press-Publications/Counterinsurgency-and-Stability/>); <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf>
12. Matthew Stephen Sluss-Tiller was born on February 14, 1974, in Ashland, Kentucky, and grew up in Catlettsburg, Kentucky. <https://www.taps.org/gratefulnation>; <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>; <https://www.swcs.mil/Portals/111/ca_sluss-tiller.pdf>; <https://www.airbornesignal.com/copy-2-of-gwot-murphy>; <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>;(<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/pdf/CREC-2014-04-03.pdf>)
13. The blast also killed three children and a Pakistani paramilitary soldier, and wounded two other U.S. service members. <https://thefallen.militarytimes.com/army-sgt-1st-class-matthew-s-sluss-tiller/4494757>;(<https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/903782/us-military-deaths-in-pakistan/>)
14. SFC Sluss-Tiller's father, Edward Tiller, affirmed his early ambition, recalling, "From the time I bought him his first GI Joe, he wanted to be an Army man".(<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/html/CREC-2014-04-03-pt1-PgS2137.htm>)
15. Brenda Thornbury, his former art teacher, observed that "he knew from a young age what he wanted to do" and was "always eager to do whatever he needed to do to serve his country."(<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/html/CREC-2014-04-03-pt1-PgS2137.htm>)
16. SFC Sluss-Tiller's parents divorced when he was young, but he maintained good relationships with his biological parents and step-parents. Melissa often spoke of their close connection, noting, "He used to sing to me and Hannah… He would dance with her standing on his feet, singing loudly".(<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/html/CREC-2014-04-03-pt1-PgS2137.htm>); <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>;(<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/pdf/CREC-2014-04-03-senate.pdf>)
17. Melissa and Matthew were married for 16 years. <https://www.taps.org/gratefulnation>; <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>
18. SFC Sluss-Tiller was a devoted husband and a loving father to their daughter, Hannah, who was merely three years old at the time of his passing. <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>; <https://www.taps.org/gratefulnation>;(https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/html/CREC-2014-04-03-pt1-PgS2137.htm);(https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/pdf/CREC-2014-04-03-senate.pdf)
19. SFC Sluss-Tiller's wife, Melissa, affectionately referred to him as "my hero," emphasizing that "He loved people… He had a heart of gold and would readily do anything for anybody". <https://www.airbornesignal.com/copy-2-of-gwot-murphy>
20. Lieutenant General John Mulholland described SFC Sluss-Tiller as "one of the finest soldiers in the world" and a vital part of "America's Army Special Operations Forces."(<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/html/CREC-2014-04-03-pt1-PgS2137.htm>); <https://www.swcs.mil/Portals/111/ca_sluss-tiller.pdf>
21. SFC Sluss-Tiller was widely regarded as the "epitome of what a soldier should be"—brave, determined, hardworking, compassionate, and an outstanding leader who commanded respect. He "never complained and gave over one-hundred percent everyday of his service." His goal was to continuously challenge himself and join "more elite units" to "make a difference." His hobbies included golfing, hunting, riding four-wheelers, swimming, bike riding and exercising to stay fit. He also loved learning and speaking several languages, including Arabic. <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>; <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>; <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>
22. SFC Sluss-Tiller enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves in 1991 as a heavy construction mechanic and transitioned to active duty in 1993 as a signal specialist, serving at Fort Bragg, Germany, and Kuwait. <https://www.airbornesignal.com/copy-2-of-gwot-murphy>;(https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/html/CREC-2014-04-03-pt1-PgS2137.htm); <https://www.swcs.mil/Portals/111/ca_sluss-tiller.pdf>; <https://arsof-history.org/fallen/2010_sluss-tiller_matthew.html>
23. A significant turning point in his career occurred in April 2009 when he was assigned to the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne), a component of the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade (Airborne), based at Fort Bragg. Within this unit, he served initially as a Civil Affairs Noncommissioned Officer in the Civil-Military Operations Cell, and most recently as Team Sergeant of Civil Affairs Team 622. <https://www.airbornesignal.com/copy-2-of-gwot-murphy>;(https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/html/CREC-2014-04-03-pt1-PgS2137.htm); <https://www.swcs.mil/Portals/111/ca_sluss-tiller.pdf>; <https://arsof-history.org/fallen/2010_hartman_david.html>
24. The 96th Civil Affairs Battalion is notable as part of the only active-duty U.S. special operations forces civil affairs brigade. <https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/96th-civil-affairs-battalion-airborne-advise-maintain-create/>; <https://arsof-history.org/pdf/handbook_civil_affairs/>;(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/96th_Civil_Affairs_Battalion>); <https://www.airbornesignal.com/copy-2-of-gwot-murphy>;(https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/903782/us-military-deaths-in-pakistan/); <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/636325/civil-affairs-overview>; <https://www.airbornesignal.com/copy-2-of-gwot-murphy>
25. SFC Sluss-Tiller deployed in support of Operation Joint Guardian in Kosovo, Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq, and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.(<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/html/CREC-2014-04-03-pt1-PgS2137.htm>); <https://www.swcs.mil/Portals/111/ca_sluss-tiller.pdf>; <https://arsof-history.org/fallen/index.html>
26. SFC Sluss-Tiller completed the U.S. Army Airborne course, Jumpmaster course, Master Jumpmaster course, Air Movement Operations course, Military Transition Team course, Civil Affairs Qualification Course (CAQC), and Advanced and Basic Noncommissioned Officer's courses.(https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/html/CREC-2014-04-03-pt1-PgS2137.htm); <https://www.swcs.mil/Portals/111/ca_sluss-tiller.pdf>; <https://www.airbornesignal.com/copy-2-of-gwot-murphy>; <https://www.swcs.mil/Portals/111/NewcomersGuide.pdf>
27. SFC Sluss-Tiller was killed when insurgents attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device (IED). <https://www.airbornesignal.com/copy-2-of-gwot-murphy>;(<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/html/CREC-2014-04-03-pt1-PgS2137.htm>); <https://thefallen.militarytimes.com/army-sgt-1st-class-matthew-s-sluss-tiller/4494757>; <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>
28. The blast occurred outside a school, a location that underscores the civilian-centric nature of his mission. <https://thefallen.militarytimes.com/army-sgt-1st-class-matthew-s-sluss-tiller/4494757>; <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>
29. SFC Sluss-Tiller's awards and decorations include two Meritorious Service Medals (one with 1 Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster), five Army Commendation Medals (one with 4 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters), the Joint Service Achievement Medal, five Army Achievement Medals (one with 4 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters), five Army Good Conduct Medals, the National Defense Service Medal with bronze star, the Kosovo Campaign Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, and the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal. He was also recognized with the Senior Parachutist's Badge, the Gold Recruiter's Badge with three sapphires, and German Jump wings. <https://www.airbornesignal.com/copy-2-of-gwot-murphy>;(https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2014-04-03/html/CREC-2014-04-03-pt1-PgS2137.htm); <https://www.swcs.mil/Portals/111/ca_sluss-tiller.pdf>
30. The Purple Heart is awarded to members of the U.S. Armed Forces who are wounded or killed as a direct or indirect result of enemy action, requiring treatment by a medical officer.([https://www.woundedwarrior.marines.mil/Portals/213/Docs/WWR%20Fact%20Sheets/Purple%20Heart%20Fact%20Sheet%20(Benefit)%20-%20Released%2012112017.pdf?ver=2017-12-12-110210-387](https://www.woundedwarrior.marines.mil/Portals/213/Docs/WWR%20Fact%20Sheets/Purple%20Heart%20Fact%20Sheet%20%28Benefit%29%20-%20Released%2012112017.pdf?ver=2017-12-12-110210-387)); <https://www.legalhelpforveterans.com/2021/08/05/how-to-get-a-purple-heart-after-discharge/>;(https://www.afpc.af.mil/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/421938/purple-heart/)
31. The Bronze Star Medal is awarded for heroism, outstanding achievement, or meritorious service (not involving aerial flight) in a combat theater.(https://www.rollofhonor.org/public/htmldetails.aspx?Cat=award&EntID=4001); <https://www.marines.mil/Combat-Awards/Article/1831640/bronze-star/>; <https://www.marines.mil/Combat-Awards/Article/1831640/bronze-star/>
32. Organizations like Spirit of America have actively supported "Operation Sluss-Tiller," integrating real-world examples to enhance its realism and effectiveness. <https://spiritofamerica.org/support-civil-affairs-sluss-tiller>
33. A bridge on Kentucky Route 1098 in Knott County was officially designated the "SFC Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller Memorial Bridge." <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>;([https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/record/12RS/hjr23/bill.doc);(https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/acts/12RS/documents/0153.pdf](https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/record/12RS/hjr23/bill.doc);(https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/acts/12RS/documents/0153.pdf))
34. A memorial street sign also exists on Fort Bragg. <https://arsof-history.org/fallen/2010_sluss-tiller_matthew.html>; <https://arsof-history.org/fallen/2010_sluss-tiller_matthew.html>
35. The Tunnel to Towers Foundation, through its Gold Star Family Home Program, paid off the mortgage of the Sluss-Tiller family home, providing Melissa and Hannah with a mortgage-free residence. <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>; <https://t2t.org/gold-star/>
36. The Tunnel to Towers Foundation's Gold Star Family Home Program aims to honor the legacy of those who made the ultimate sacrifice and provide tangible support to their surviving spouses and young children. <https://t2t.org/gold-star/>; <https://www.taps.org/gratefulnation>
37. The mortgage-free home significantly reduced financial stress for Melissa, enabling her to focus on Hannah's major spinal fusion surgeries. <https://t2t.org/gold_star_family/matthew-stephen-sluss-tiller/>
38. Author’s note and confirmation that he served in the 82nd Signal Battalion immediately after going active duty in 1993.